

## *A Rich Tapestry*

An exhibition curated by Jonathan Watkins and  
Aisha Khalid at the Lahore Biennale  
26 January – 29 February 2020



Mangla Dam © Mahtab Hussain  
From the series *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* (2016)

Ikon participates in the second Lahore Biennale (LBo2), presenting artwork by four artists from its current programme in an exhibition curated by Jonathan Watkins and Aisha Khalid. Work by Mahtab Hussain, Matthew Krishanu, Farwa Moledina and Osman Yousefzada, all of South Asian British heritage, will be shown alongside that of two prominent Pakistani artists, Ali Kazim and Imran Qureshi.

The exhibition takes place in three venues, including two of Khalid's studio spaces which she is sharing to encourage cultural exchange. A collateral project for the Lahore Biennale, *A Rich Tapestry* combines painting (Krishanu), photography (Hussain) installation and fashion (Yousefzada) and textiles (Moledina). The Lahore-based artists (Kazim and Qureshi) present site-specific installations at a third venue, a dis-used brick factory. The works in *A Rich Tapestry* address issues such as displacement, violence – both domestic and geopolitical – and gender politics, offering significant correspondence with Khalid's own artistic practice.

For the British artists involved, *A Rich Tapestry* will be a mini-residency. It will generate significant opportunities for widening their professional horizons, including meeting many artists and curators, both resident and those visiting Lahore for the Biennale. Likewise, visitors to the exhibition will gain first-hand insights into the UK art scene.

*Ikon's investment in young and emerging artists has clearly been worthwhile, with many going on to flourish in their professional careers. Having already worked with each of the artists exhibiting in Lahore, we remain committed to them, keen to assist in their next steps towards greater success.* Jonathan Watkins, Ikon Director

## Mahtab Hussain



*Red hijab, red dress and bling* ©Mahtab Hussain  
From the series *Honest With You* (2013)

British artist Mahtab Hussain (b. 1981) explores the important relationship between identity, heritage and displacement. His themes develop through long-term research articulating a visual language that challenges the prevailing concepts of multiculturalism.

In Lahore, Hussain shows an image of the Mangla Dam, Pakistan, from his series *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* (2016) alongside works from his series *Honest With You* (2009-ongoing). Ikon has worked with Hussain a number of times, notably onboard Ikon's canal boat in 2016 when he presented *The Auspicious Journey* – a body of work about the mass displacement of people in Kashmir, Pakistan in the 1960s, due to the construction of the Mangla Dam. Some of those affected were given work permits for Britain by the Government of Pakistan, with many making their way to find work in the Midlands or the North West.

Hussain received his BA in History of Art at Goldsmiths, University of London, specialising in Fine Art Photography; his MA in Museum and Gallery Management, City University, London; and an MA in Photography at Nottingham Trent University.

## Matthew Krishanu



Matthew Krishanu, *Crow (orange)* (2018).  
Oil on board. Image courtesy the artist.

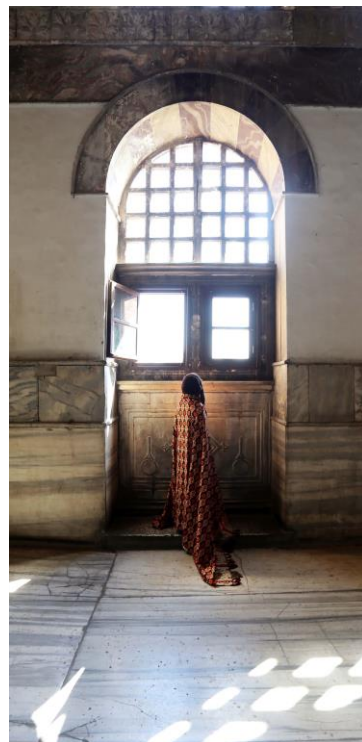
Born in Bradford, Matthew Krishanu lived in Bangladesh from the age of one to 12 before moving back to England. Recent exhibitions such as *The Sun Never Sets* (mac, Birmingham, 2019, Huddersfield Art Gallery, 2018) deal with deep personal and emotive content. Large and small paintings sit side by side as Krishanu depicts his own childhood memories, at once specific and autobiographical, but also generic image types that appeal to a collective memory.

Likewise, Krishanu's 2019 presentation at Ikon, *A Murder of Crows*, drew from his childhood memories of Bangladesh. Dozens of the artist's painted crows were displayed throughout Ikon's neo-gothic building - always painted singly and never in flight they appear almost anthropomorphic on their twin legs, whether looking directly at the viewer or stepping away. Krishanu's painted crows travel to Lahore, displayed in a scattered flight around the studio space.

Krishanu graduated from Exeter University with a BA (Hons) Fine Art and English Literature in 2001 and from Central Saint Martins in 2009 with an MA in Fine Art.



## Farwa Moledina



Farwa Moledina, *No one is neutral here and You must choose your part in the end* (2020).  
Image courtesy the artist.

Farwa Moledina grew up in Dubai, U.A.E, and now lives in Birmingham, UK. As a Muslim woman born and raised in the Middle East and currently living in the West, her work addresses ideas surrounding Feminism, faith and issues concerning women of colour. Most recently, Moledina has been concerned with re-appropriating and reclaiming Orientalist imagery of Muslim women, inviting viewers to question Orientalist stereotypes and the prevalence of Orientalism in current society. Through her work, Moledina aims to create more nuanced debate regarding female Muslim identity within the world of contemporary art.

For *A Rich Tapestry*, Moledina presents *No one is neutral here and You must choose your part in the end* (2020). A series of photographic prints on textiles, the works feature an anonymous woman photographed at the Ayasofya (Hagia Sofia) in Istanbul. When paired, the two images speak of enduring gender politics whilst also challenging the West's voyeuristic view of Eastern women. The titles are taken directly from the poem *I Have a Seat in the Abandoned Theatre* by late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish.

Moledina graduated in 2018 from School of Art, Birmingham City University, with a BA in Fine Art. The following year she participated in *Forward: New Art from Birmingham*, Ikon's off-site exhibition showcasing work by twenty five artists, living and working in Birmingham. *Forward* demonstrated that now, more than ever, Birmingham's artistic community is thriving.

## Osman Yousefzada



Osman Yousefzada, *Being Somewhere Else*. Installation Ikon Gallery (2018)

Artist and fashion designer Osman Yousefzada's work exists within what he calls a "migrant soup" aesthetic – a rich mix of theology, ritual, contemporary European art and the crossing of continental and cultural borders.

For *A Rich Tapestry*, Osman presents *Huis-clos (No Exit)* (2020), an elevated internal structure of an Eastern grave. Raised to ground level, and intersected by a walkway opening onto an area for contemplation, the immersive work asks viewers to find new ways to engage with a traditional place of loss and mourning. Surrounded by a partition curtain, the setting offers both a sense of intimacy and disguise. The work also opens up a previously clandestine space - in its original form the grave would exclude 50% of the population (females), who are barred from participating in its ceremonial function or being allowed to view it before it becomes an earth filled mound. Alongside this is an earlier film, *her dreams are bigger* (2018) featuring interviews with fast fashion garment workers in Bangladesh and a series of dreamscapes.

Since launching his eponymous label in 2008, Yousefzada has forged a niche in luxury womenswear. His family background, the son of Afghan and Pakistani migrants in Birmingham, gave him a grounding in both technique and aesthetic. Yousefzada studied at London's Central St Martins, Cambridge University and the School of African and Oriental Studies, London.

In June 2018, Ikon presented his first solo art exhibition, *Being Somewhere Else*, a show about cultural displacement, and the female experience of dominance and, subsequently, empowerment.

## Ali Kazim



Ali Kazim, *Conference of birds* (2020). Production image, courtesy the artist.

Ali Kazim was born in Pakistan and currently lives and works in Lahore.

As part of *A Rich Tapestry*, Kazim shows *Conference of birds* (2020), a new site-specific work comprised of thousands of unbaked clay birds. Kazim's sculptures follow an earlier large-scale watercolour work on paper, offering a rendition of *The Conference of the Birds*, the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Persian allegory by Farid ud-Din Attar. In Attar's poem, birds such as the peacock, parrot, owl and nightingale follow the hoopoe, the wisest of the birds, on a quest to locate the mythical simurgh – their desired leader. The hazardous journey ends with an epiphany as the birds realise that they, in fact, are the simurgh. The sovereign or beloved that they sought was a part of them all along, and they of it. In his latest work, Kazim's sculptures will, over time, return to become part of the Lahore soil.

Kazim received his BFA degree from the National College of Arts, Lahore in 2002 and an MFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London in 2011. Kazim has exhibited widely in international solo and group shows, has received a number of awards and artist residencies and is part of the Faculty of Fine Arts Department, National College of Arts, Lahore.

## Imran Qureshi



Imran Qureshi, *Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust* (2020)  
Image courtesy the artist.

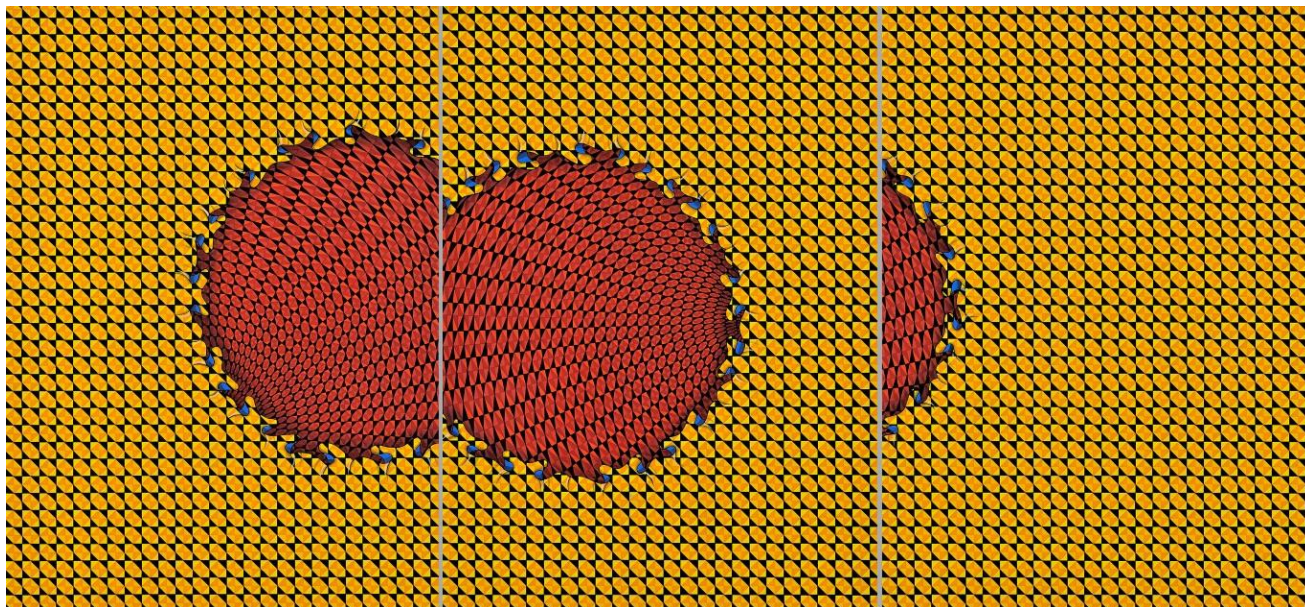
Imran Qureshi was born in Hyderabad, Pakistan (1972) and is one of the most important contemporary artists from the subcontinent. His work is rooted in the tradition of miniature painting, reclaiming and transporting it to the present day in site-specific installations, three-dimensional works, videos and paintings. His work combines a local background with a global outlook, artistically, socially and politically.

*Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust* (2020) is Qureshi's site-specific work for *A Rich Tapestry*. In each niche of the brick factory's kiln the artist has inserted a block-like sculptural form made from thousands of sheets of printed crumpled paper. These sculptures will be made subsequently in terracotta clay and baked in the brick kiln. Each form has a photographic image of Qureshi's earlier site-specific paintings and installations from around the world, ensuring a global context for this new work. The blood-red painted marks with delicate flowers stemming from them represent the phenomena of life and death or beauty and violence. For Qureshi it is a response to multiple tragic incidents as well as the threat of global warming to the environment.

Qureshi earned a BFA at the National College of Art, Lahore in 1993, where he continues to teach miniature painting today. He has exhibited internationally for almost twenty years and in 2014/15 Ikon presented his most comprehensive exhibition to date in the UK. Prizes include the Sharjah Biennale 10 Art Prize (2011), Deutsche Bank's "Artist of the Year" (2013) and the Medal of Arts Award, State Department Washington (2017).



## Aisha Khalid



Aisha Khalid, *DIVIDED* (2017). Triptych, gouache on wasli paper. Courtesy the artist.

Aisha Khalid (b. 1972, Lahore) is one of Pakistan's most prominent contemporary artists. Schooled in traditional miniature painting, she has become a leading figure in developing the medium for modern audiences and attitudes. Khalid works in various mediums including painting, murals, site-specific installations, videos and more recently she has included music within her art performances.

The artist's new initiative is turning her own studio spaces into shared environments for cultural exchange. In a constantly developing art project these studios and her gardens will evolve with over time.

Ikon presents a major exhibition of work by Khalid: 2 December 2020 – 21 February 2021.

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small or Laura Jaunzems on 0121 248 0708 or email [r.small@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:r.small@ikon-gallery.org) or [l.jaunzems@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:l.jaunzems@ikon-gallery.org)

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Links: [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)  
[Lahorebiennale.org](http://Lahorebiennale.org)



## Note to Editors:

1. The Lahore Biennale Foundation has announced the appointment of Hoor Al Qasimi as the Curator of the second edition of the Lahore Biennale (26 January – 29 February 2020). The inaugural Lahore Biennale was held in March 2018 and attracted 1.5 million visitors. LBo2 hopes to build on the strengths of the first Biennale and to further develop programs and public outreach. With Al Qasimi, the President & Director of Sharjah Art Foundation and seasoned curator at it's helm, the Lahore Biennale Foundation hopes to extend LBo2's scope to West Asia and the Middle East. [www.lahorebiennale.org](http://www.lahorebiennale.org)
2. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)
3. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. For the latest news and events follow @ikongallery on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ikongallery), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ikongallery) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/ikongallery).
4. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. ACE support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, ACE will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. [artscouncil.org.uk](http://artscouncil.org.uk)